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## Maricopa court going paperless

*Lawyers will start filing briefs online*

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Legal briefs just got briefer, and the paper trail just petered out.

Maricopa County Superior Court officials announced Wednesday that on June 20, attorneys will start filing legal documents electronically in two divisions of civil court. And by 2008, according to Presiding Judge Colin Campbell, all court paperwork will be digital and paper records will be eliminated.

"This will be the biggest technological change for the court and the clerk of the court in our history," Campbell said.

Campbell and Clerk of the Court Michael Jeanes, speaking at a news conference Wednesday, said the switch would make the court more efficient and more accessible to the public and the legal profession alike.

According to the court, more than 140,000 paper documents are filed each month in Superior Court, about 1,400 square feet a year.

As Jeanes pointed out, the archives at the court clerk's customer service center at Jackson and Sixth Avenues were supposed to accommodate seven years of documents, but instead were filled in half that time.

"I'm wildly enthusiastic," said Judge Pendleton Gaines, who has been involved in a pilot experiment with the new system. "It avoids arguments and controversies over when a document was served."

"Lawyers love to argue about things like that."

The court has been experimenting with online options. In December, it debuted a Turbo Tax-style online program for generating divorce documents, and has since come out with other family court programs that are easily accessible to the public.

The new system will allow attorneys to file from any computer, making the documents immediately available to the judge and the other parties to the case.

The public will be able to review files on computers at the customer service center. That technology is already in use at the service center, where most documents from recent cases have already been digitally scanned and are viewable onscreen.

"It's about time," said Doreen Garrison, a paralegal and technological consultant to law firms. "It's a savings in time and cost."

The electronic submission sidesteps secretaries, copying centers and messenger services.

"You file straight from your desk," Garrison said.

Jay Dushoff, an attorney at Gallagher & Kennedy, said: "In my opinion, it will have the advantage of reducing costs to the clients. Anything that can be done to keep legal costs under control is in the public interest."

But he stopped short of total endorsement.

"I'm bothered by the fact that storage is only electron- ic," he said. "That is a little scary."

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